(Mount Clipping In Space Below)

PRESS FREEDOM ISSUE--SHERIDAN

Says He Will Surrender to Authorities in N.O.

WASHINGTON (AP) — NBC newsman Walter J. Sheridan, saying freedom of the press is involved, declared Wednesday he would go to New Orleans to surrender to authorities.

Sheridan has been charged with trying to bribe a witness in the probe of District Attorney Jim Garrison into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

"I have no intention of avoiding meeting this issue which involves a basic principle of freedom of the press," Sheridan said.

"In this I have the full support of NBC (National Broadcasting Company)".

Sheridan said he would go to New Orleans in the next few days.

He was an investigative newsman for NBC for a program that was presented June 19. The program criticized Garrison's procedures in the assassination probe.

Sheridan and two others involved in the NBC program appeared at a news conference at NBC studios here.

INTIMIDATION HELD AIM

But Sheridan and Fred Freed, producer of the show, said Garrison's charges were an attempt to intimidate NBC News.

"The real issue is whether Garrison or any district attorney can use the criminal process to try to intimidate reporters," Sheridan said.

Sheridan added that "I, and NBC News, are not going to be intimidated. Neither are the rest of the news media."

Sheridan was charged with attempting to bribe Perry Raymond Russo, 25, Baton Rouge, La., a key witness in Garrison's case charging that a conspiracy in 1963 to kill Kennedy was hatched in New Orleans.

Sheridan said the charges made against him by Garrison are false and totally unfounded.

James Phelan, a writer who worked with the NBC team on the program, said that Russo initiated the conversation with him. Sheridan said it was Russo who first contacted an NBC News reporter. He said that Russo "told me and others he could no longer distinguish between fantasy and reality," and "it was Perry Russo who suggested he was in debt, worried about his job, worried about what might be revealed about his past."

TO POST BOND

Richard Townley, a newsman for WDSU-TV, NBC affiliate in New Orleans, also charged with trying to bribe and intimidate witnesses in the Kennedy probe, posted bond Tuesday in New Orleans of $2,500 on each of three charges.

Sheridan said he "hopefully" also would post bond when he turns himself in to authorities. His bond has been set at $5,000.

In a statement read by a representative at the news conference, William B. McAndrew, president of NBC News, said that "the bribery charges brought against NBC News reporter Walter Sheridan is an attempt by District Attorney Jim Garrison of New Orleans to intimidate those news media who have commented adversely on Garrison's assassination investigation."

He said that NBC News supports its reporters and "NBC News will not be intimidated."

Sheridan formerly was an investigator for the Senate rackets committee and the justice department.

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SECTION 1

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